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Chairperson: Ms. Lintonen ..... (Finland)

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07-56712 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 52: Macroeconomic policy questions (*continued*)

(a) International trade and development (*continued*) (A/62/15 (part I and Corr.1 and Corr.2, part II and Corr.1, part III and Corr.1, and part IV), A/62/71-E/2007/46, A/62/210 and A/62/266)

1. **Mr. Alahraf** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that international trade was the crucial engine of development, but that tariff protection by developed countries was obstructing the access of developing countries to markets. The developed countries needed to show flexibility to overcome the Doha Round impasse. There needed to be greater cohesion between trade and international fiscal policy. Unilateral sanctions were also an impediment to free trade and undermined international law.

2. Accession by developing countries to the World Trade Organization (WTO) should be facilitated, and he hoped that his own country's application, which had been submitted in 2004, would be accepted. Greater South-South cooperation was also needed to improve access to markets, encourage joint investment and diversify production. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had been helpful in that regard. His country was doing everything it could to encourage domestic economic growth and integrate into the global economy.

3. **Mr. Teshome** (Ethiopia) said that the liberalization of trade under the Doha Development Agenda could yield billions of dollars in gains that would largely accrue to developing countries. Nevertheless, simply opening a country to foreign trade was not enough: it must also have a coherent growth strategy. To overcome low productivity and lack of competitiveness, African enterprises must develop regional value chains that could then link into global supply chains. The international community should therefore assist regional economic commissions and other entities as they crafted policies and strategies aimed at helping the least developed countries integrate into the global economy. If the Doha Round did not reach a meaningful conclusion by the end of 2007, the negotiations might become much more complicated in the future. The developed countries must show the flexibility and political will necessary to break the current impasse.

4. Ethiopia's non-traditional exports had recently increased dramatically as a result of structural changes brought about by export diversification and import substitution. Foreign direct investment had also risen over the previous decade, partially owing to an incentive package to attract foreign and national investors to the export sector. Investment had increased significantly in horticulture, thus creating jobs for the rural poor, three quarters of whom were women.

5. His Government had also initiated the process of entry into WTO and was seeking to benefit from market access initiatives such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act of the United States and the European Union's Everything But Arms initiative. However, Government action alone could not achieve the expected results. A collective effort was required to create a mechanism through which developing countries could benefit from their comparative advantages and bring their products to international markets, without facing agricultural subsidies, tariffs and other trade barriers imposed by developed countries.

6. **Mr. Al Ajmi** (Kuwait) said that all markets should be open to the products of developing countries, which should also be able to participate in formulating global economic policies.

7. Since joining WTO in 1995, his Government had brought its economic and trade laws into line with the requirements for integration into the global economy. It had also launched ambitious projects concerning privatization, infrastructure and transportation, construction of new cities and investment in oil and energy and, through the Gulf Cooperation Council, was negotiating free trade agreements with various States.

8. The Millennium Development Goals were achievable, and many countries had made good progress. He called on the developed countries to fulfil their promises of development assistance, debt reduction and elimination of customs barriers to allow the products of developing countries to flow into their markets. The outcome would be an open and equitable financial and trade system under the WTO umbrella.

9. **Mr. Choi** Su-Young (Republic of Korea) said that the rapid economic growth of developing countries had led to a paradigm shift in the international system of trade. Private entities were playing a larger role as a consequence of privatization and deregulation, while developing countries were facing increasing non-tariff

barriers. The timely conclusion of the Doha Round would be crucial in dealing with that new situation. To achieve an even-handed outcome of the negotiations, rules and service sector issues should be addressed together with market access issues, under the "single undertaking" principle.

10. Free trade agreements could play a useful complementary role to the multilateral trading system, as long as they retained its norms and principles. The international community must take advantage of the proliferation of bilateral and regional agreements to further promote international trade and help the multilateral trading system to function more effectively.

11. His delegation strongly supported the Aid for Trade Initiative, which should focus on building the productive and technological capacities of recipients and thus enable them to profit from trading opportunities.

12. **Mr. Heaton** (Canada) said that the Doha Round needed strong leadership and the full engagement of all parties to deliver on its original promise of improving the prospects for economic growth and development, as well as poverty reduction, for the benefit of both developed and developing countries.

13. A General Assembly resolution should not attempt to tackle complex subjects that were under discussion by expert trade negotiators in another forum. Instead, a consensual agreement on a resolution that sent an overarching message of political support underlining the importance of the early and successful conclusion of the Round would be significant.

14. **Mr. Pokhrel** (Nepal) said that the credibility and relevance of the multilateral trading system depended on the successful conclusion of the Doha Round. Lack of progress in the negotiations had allowed poorer countries to become further marginalized. Both the Director-General of WTO and the Secretary-General of UNCTAD had underlined that the Doha development deal was "doable", and he hoped that such a deal would be reached soon.

15. It was alarming that the least developed countries had been unable to translate growth into poverty reduction or expand their share in world trade. A paradigm shift was required if trade was to help improve the standard of living in those countries. All their exports, including such products as textiles and garments, must be given duty-free and quota-free market access. They also needed resources to cover adjustment costs and ensure the smooth transition to a stable and competitive economy. Opportunities for trade in services, which offered prospects for human development, should also be pursued. While private-sector initiatives and the application of science and technology could help remove supply-side constraints, capacity-building and funding measures through aid for trade initiatives were also crucial if the least developed countries were to benefit from trade liberalization.

16. As a member of WTO and the South Asian Free Trade Area, Nepal had seen its volume of trade grow over the years. The country faced a widening trade deficit, however, as imports outstripped exports. His Government was focusing on economic diplomacy aimed at expanding and diversifying trade. It was also working to improve the investment climate, human resources, public-private partnerships, the private sector and customs procedures. Greater development cooperation from the international community would be crucial as the Government rebuilt Nepal's physical infrastructure and restructured its economy.

17. **Mr. Tommy** (United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)) said that UNIDO support services to developing countries were helping them to develop their competitive production capacity, ensure that products met market standards, develop human resources to provide economic analysis and monitoring, participate in international trade negotiations and rationalize customs procedures. As the largest provider of technical assistance on trade within the United Nations system, UNIDO was part of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) working group whose task was to improve the coordination of such activities. The working group planned to publish a manual that would give resident coordinators details on all the programmes and services available.

18. UNIDO was working with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) on a programme of industrial modernization and restructuring in preparation for 2008, when accords on trade liberalization with the European Union would take effect. Similar regional programmes were under way in countries of the Mekong Basin and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

19. UNIDO helped countries to develop internationally recognized certification services and

was assisting African cotton producers to establish regional production standards, improve the quality of their product, strengthen their value-added processing capacity and export cotton and cotton by-products. It was also helping countries to attract foreign investment by improving their investment systems and creating alliances between developing countries and foreign companies. The promotion of South-South cooperation had become one of the main focuses of UNIDO work on technology transfer, which increasingly involved transfers from China and India to other developing countries.

20. In November 2007, UNIDO would hold a conference of industry and trade ministers from the least developed countries on the question: "How can aid for trade transform the least developed countries?"

Agenda item 54: Sustainable development (A/62/343, A/62/356 and A/62/486; A/C.2/62/2; A/C.2/62/L.5)

(a) Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (A/62/262 and A/62/376)

(b) Follow-up to and implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/62/279)

(c) International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/61/699-E/2007/8 and Add.1; A/62/320, A/62/340, A/62/371 and A/62/372)

(d) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (A/62/78-E/2007/62 and A/62/276)

(e) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (A/62/276; A/C.2/62/7)

(f) Convention on Biological Diversity (A/62/276)

(g) Report of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme on its twenty-fourth session (A/62/25)

(h) Sustainable mountain development (A/62/292)

(i) Promotion of new and renewable sources of energy (A/62/208; A/C.2/62/8)

21. **Ms. de Laurentis** (Secretary of the Committee) drew attention to a note by the Secretariat on the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forest (A/C.2/62/L.5), which was before the Committee for action at a later date under agenda item 54. At its resumed substantive session earlier that month, the Economic and Social Council had decided to recommend the draft resolution on the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forest to the General Assembly for approval.

22. **Mr. Holmes** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/62/320), said that more people were threatened by natural hazards and extreme weather than at any other time in history, as exemplified by the massive floods across Asia and much of Africa in summer 2007. Central America, Viet Nam and Haiti were the latest countries to suffer. The link between climate change and the increased number and intensity of such extreme weather-related events seemed clear. In addition, sea level rise could increase the impact of some geological events, such as tsunamis, while heavy rains could trigger landslides and mudslides. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change itself had stated that such changes were already becoming evident in different parts of the world. As noted in the report (para. 4), urban settlements were a growing focus of disaster risk.

23. Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action was therefore more urgent than ever. Climate change discussions must emphasize adaptation — of which disaster risk reduction was a crucial part — and mitigation. The next major opportunity would be the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Bali in December.

24. He highlighted certain policies to reduce disaster risks described in the report. Despite those efforts, however, the world was not on track to achieve the Hyogo Framework proposed outcome of a substantial reduction in disaster losses by 2015. Clear targets needed to be articulated at the global and national levels.

25. He drew attention to three noteworthy developments during the reporting period: the meeting in June 2007 of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction; the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery; and the development of new donor policies to increase funding for disaster risk reduction. His Office, supported by the World Bank, was about to launch a new study on the economic costs and benefits of investments in disaster risk reduction, which, it was hoped, would clearly demonstrate the value of such investments.

26. Noting that, currently, the Strategy secretariat was entirely funded through voluntary, extrabudgetary contributions and given the increasing importance of disaster risk reduction, he also drew attention to the Secretary-General's invitation to Member States to consider alternative methods of financing the Strategy secretariat, including through assessed contributions.

27. He then introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the Global Survey of Early Warning Systems (A/62/340), which recommended the development of a globally comprehensive early warning system and proposed a set of specific actions towards building national people-centred early warning systems.

28. **Mr. Jomo** (Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development) read out a statement on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

29. For the third time in four years, the Nobel Peace Prize had been awarded to individuals and organizations dedicated to the advancement of sustainable development, thereby reminding the international community of the broader value and contributions of sustainable development. The year 2007 also marked the twentieth anniversary of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future (Brundtland Report), which had raised global awareness of sustainable development and illustrated the urgent need for a new paradigm for development. The concept of sustainable development had evolved into an overarching framework for promoting economic growth, advancing social development and protecting the environment.

30. The General Assembly had played a key role in nurturing and supporting sustainable development as a guide for United Nations activities. It also continued to play a key role in guiding global efforts to advance sustainable development.

31. He then introduced the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (A/62/262), on the follow-up to and implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/62/279), on the promotion of new and renewable sources of energy (A/62/208) and on products harmful to health and the environment (A/62/78-E/2007/62).

32. Participants in the fifteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development had achieved near unanimity on industrial development and air pollution/atmosphere, and made significant progress on energy and climate change, including on access to energy and the transition to a low-carbon economy. However, they had remained divided on several issues, including time-bound targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency. Consequently, for the first time in its history, the Commission had concluded its session without reaching consensus.

33. In view of that situation, the international community must reaffirm its commitment to a strengthened Commission on Sustainable Development and to the important, if difficult, objective of achieving consensus on policy options and practical measures to advance sustainable development. The Commission should continue to strengthen such innovative activities as the Partnerships Fair, Learning Centre, participation of major groups, intersectoral dialogue between ministers and other decision makers, regional and thematic discussions, and the day dedicated to small island developing States, all of which had enriched its discussions. The Commission could not meet the challenges facing it without the unanimous support of all Member States.

34. **Mr. Gnacadja** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification) welcomed the decision to invite eminent authorities on development and finance to participate in the Committee's debate. In the future, the Committee might wish to consider extending that invitation to experts on desertification, climate change and biological diversity.

35. The secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification faced two major challenges: turning the Convention into a systemic and worldwide response to global environmental issues affecting land and its ecosystems, including through linkages with its sister Rio Conventions, and translating political commitments into concrete actions. Since the Convention's adoption in 1994, the world had changed significantly. The market had become the driving force and climate change had gained momentum. New tragedies and new concepts were emerging, such as environmental refugees, and water and land as human rights and/or public commodities. The Convention could serve humanity by being an instrument not only for implementing sustainable development nationally and regionally, but also for tackling global environmental issues. That was the challenge facing stakeholders today.

36. Desertification and land degradation must be addressed urgently if countries were to adapt to climate change, mitigate its effects and strengthen their resilience. Indeed, combating desertification was a unique, integrated and synergetic way for countries to adapt to climate change. In order to have a systemic and worldwide response to desertification and land degradation, political commitments must be translated into concrete actions.

37. He then introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa and on the outcome of the celebration of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (A/62/276, annex II), which provided an update on activities undertaken under the Convention since the adoption of resolution 61/202 and in the context of resolution 58/211 on the celebration of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. In that regard, he drew attention to the fifth session of the Committee on the Review of the Implementation of the Convention, at which seven panel discussions had covered regional and global issues as described in the thematic topics of decision 1/COP.5 and the strategic areas of decision 8/COP.4 (ibid., para. 7) and a global interactive dialogue had been convened on investments in rural areas in the context of combating land degradation and desertification (ibid., para. 9); the collaboration between the secretariats of the Convention and of the Commission on Sustainable Development in preparation for the latter's sixteenth session (ibid., para. 15), noting, in that regard, that the Conference of the Parties had directed the Convention secretariat to participate in the Commission's next cycle in order to ensure that the core issues covered by the Convention were duly considered; and, lastly, the outcome of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (ibid., para. 31).

38. The Secretary-General's report (A/62/276, annex II) should be considered in conjunction with the note by the Secretariat on the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (2008-2018) (A/C.2/62/7), which had been issued at a later stage to reflect a key outcome of the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties, held in Madrid in September 2007. That session had been a historical one in many aspects. After a decade of implementation, the Parties had recognized that a number of limiting factors had prevented optimal deployment of the Convention and had therefore adopted the 10-year strategic plan and framework, to guide implementation over the next decade.

39. The Conference of the Parties had adopted a number of other key decisions with a view to removing most of the barriers to implementation, but had failed to reach consensus on the budget of the Convention secretariat. The Parties had therefore decided to convene an extraordinary session where they would consider the paragraph of the draft decision on the programme and budget for the biennium 2008-2009 relating to the level of increase in the Convention's budget for the biennium 2008-2009. That session would take place in New York on 26 November 2007.

40. Since taking office, he had been consulting colleagues on a road map to move forward the 10-year strategic plan and framework and discussing practical steps with other stakeholders, in particular the Global Mechanism. He also intended to organize a high-level policy dialogue in spring 2008 to foster awareness among relevant decision makers, and to use the next Commission on Sustainable Development cycle to harness support for the implementation of the strategic plan and framework. Desertification and land degradation affected the most vulnerable segments of society, hampering their efforts to improve their standard of living. The 10-year strategic plan could

make a difference and the international community must now help to implement it.

41. **Mr. Thorgeirsson** (Director, Sustainable Development Programme, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), introducing the report of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on the United Nations Climate Change Conference, Nairobi, 2006, and its follow-up (A/62/276, annex I), said that there had been a sea change in the politics of climate change during 2007, particularly based on the scientific evidence contained in the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and as a result of the momentum created by the recent High-level Event on Climate Change. It had become clear that climate change was a reality and that the cost of inaction would far outweigh the cost of early action.

42. The 2005 United Nations Climate Change Conference had identified key building blocks for a future climate change regime based on adaptation and mitigation, on the one hand, and technology and financing, on the other. However, the fourth assessment report had also driven home the urgent need for a comprehensive, enhanced and re-energized international response to climate change, complemented by national and regional efforts, for the post-2012 period. It would therefore be essential to adopt a road map in December 2007 at the Bali Climate Change Conference to prevent a gap between the end of the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period in 2012 and the entry into force of a new climate change regime. Moreover, a future climate change agreement must be in force by the end of 2012.

43. The High-level Event on Climate Change had sent a powerful signal to the world that the political will existed at the highest level to break with the past and to act decisively. Negotiations on a future climate change agreement should be comprehensive and inclusive, leading to a single multilateral framework. All other processes or initiatives should therefore be compatible with the processes involved in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and should facilitate the successful conclusion of the new agreement. To that end, it would be necessary to increase the number of meetings held over the forthcoming biennium, the additional costs of which should be borne by the Parties. The conference servicing costs for such meetings should come from the regular budget.

44. Ongoing challenges to be met prior to 2012 included measures to tackle deforestation in developing countries, movement from adaptation towards implementation, and efforts to render the Adaptation Fund under the Kyoto Protocol operational. Work was also under way to provide a broader response to climate change within the United Nations system as a whole. In that connection, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had launched the Nairobi Framework, a collaborative effort by several agencies to build capacity in those developing countries that were not yet able to access the clean development mechanism.

45. **Mr. Jalbert** (Principal Officer, Division of Social, Economic and Legal Affairs, Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity) read out a statement by the Executive Secretary of the Convention.

46. Introducing the report of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (A/62/276, annex III), he said that cooperation had increased with other international organizations in recent months with a view to integrating biodiversity considerations into their regional programmes. Partnerships with other biodiversity-related conventions had been strengthened, as evidenced by the adoption of a joint work plan with the Ramsar Convention.

47. Biodiversity, climate change and desertification were closely interconnected. For that reason, the International Day for Biological Diversity had been celebrated in 2007 under the theme "Biodiversity and climate change". Two meetings of the Joint Liaison Group of the three Rio Conventions had been held in 2007 and a third meeting would be held in Bali in December. A joint contribution of the secretariats of the three Rio Conventions would subsequently be submitted to the respective meetings of the Conferences of the Parties.

48. At its twelfth meeting, in July 2007, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice had decided to progressively integrate advice concerning potential impacts of climate change on biodiversity into each programme of work of the Convention. It had also adopted a procedure for the introduction and consideration of such issues as biofuels in order to ensure timely advice regarding new developments of significance for biodiversity.

49. The Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing had met in October 2007 to continue negotiations on an international regime on access and benefit-sharing and would meet again in January 2008. The negotiations on the international regime would be completed before the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2010. The Working Group on Traditional Knowledge was continuing its work on such issues as the elements of sui generis systems for the protection of traditional knowledge and the development of a code of ethical conduct, which should ultimately contribute to the international regime on access and benefit-sharing.

50. He welcomed the fact that 143 countries had become parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which aimed to ensure the safe transfer of living modified organisms. Following the agreement reached on the issue of labelling at a meeting held in Curitiba in March 2006, work was progressing on the development of a liability regime under the Protocol.

51. Representatives from 21 cities worldwide had adopted the Curitiba Declaration on Cities and Biodiversity, which recognized the importance of urban governments in the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and reaffirmed their commitment to contributing to the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its 2010 biodiversity target. As a follow-up measure, mayors from around the world were planning to form a Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity, to be presented in May 2008 at the ninth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity.

52. **Ms. Castaño** (Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) office at United Nations Headquarters in New York), introducing the report of the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environmental Forum (A/62/25), said that the fourth Global Environment Outlook report underlined the intricate links between human activities and the environment and, in that respect, the need for sustainable development. The various United Nations reports issued on climate change in 2007 had rightly created unprecedented public and political interest in environmental issues, which should create a strong impetus for a consensus to be reached at the forthcoming Bali Climate Change Conference. The participation in the session of six heads of United Nations agencies as well as representatives from international and non-governmental organizations encouraged UNEP to fulfil its commitment as the leading United Nations body on environmental issues.

53. The session had produced many recommendations for follow-up activities relating to, inter alia: the use of economic instruments to achieve sustainable development; guidance on the management of ecosystems; strengthening national capacity and technology transfer; promoting partnerships at all levels; and improving collaboration among multilateral environmental agreements. The ongoing United Nations reform process was widely seen as an opportunity to increase coordination among United Nations agencies and bodies, particularly in the environmental field. While the persistent lack of sufficient and predictable funding was regarded as greatly hampering UNEP in the fulfilment of its mandate, it had been stressed at the session that the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building would assist countries in addressing environmental challenges.

54. Some of the decisions on chemicals management adopted at the session were of particular relevance to the topics being discussed by the Committee. They covered such issues as the prevention of illegal international traffic, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, and cooperation between UNEP, relevant multilateral environmental agreements and other organizations on waste management and on heavy metals. The session had highlighted the importance of implementing the Bali Strategic Plan and the need to further improve the proposed Environment Watch strategy. It had also requested the Executive Director to assist countries to integrate the objectives of multilateral environmental agreements into national sustainable development strategies; to continue to promote coordination across the United Nations system on environmental activities; to continue to provide UNEP support to the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, particularly through the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment; and to further enhance activities with small island developing States. Another notable decision adopted at the session was the recommendation to the General Assembly that it should declare the decade 2010-2020 as the United

Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification.

55. Her organization was engaged in internal management reforms in close consultation with the UNEP Governing Council and the Committee of Permanent Representatives in Nairobi. The previous months had in fact been pivotal in charting the course of action for UNEP in the coming years. At the request of the Governing Council, UNEP was preparing a medium-term strategy for the period 2010-2013 in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The strategy would include programmatic priorities in the following areas: environmental leadership in the area of climate change; ecosystem management; hazardous substances; disaster and post-conflict response; resource efficiency; and environmental governance. UNEP had entered into a close alliance with the United Nations Development Programme to address the poverty-environment nexus. It had also begun to discuss the renewal and broadening of its memorandum of understanding in 2008 and had recently entered into a cooperation agreement with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

56. The tenth special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environmental Forum would be held from 20 to 22 February 2008 in the Principality of Monaco. The special session would address the issues of mobilizing finance to meet the climate change challenge and environmental governance. It would also consider the fourth Global Environment Outlook report and a draft of the medium-term strategy. The deliberations of the General Assembly would be crucial in creating and maintaining the momentum for change and in establishing a road map with clear and timely signposts in order to meet the challenges ahead.

57. **Mr. Omar** (Director, a.i., Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Liaison Office with the United Nations), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on sustainable mountain development (A/62/292), said that mountains were globally important as the source of most of the Earth's freshwater and as repositories of rich biological diversity. They were, however, exceedingly fragile ecosystems and a disproportionate number of the world's most chronically undernourished people lived in mountain regions. Awareness of the importance of mountain ecosystems and communities had increased since the adoption of chapter 13 of Agenda 21, entitled "Managing fragile ecosystems: sustainable mountain development", at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. However, despite that growing awareness and the many positive results achieved, a number of key challenges remained. Mountain ecosystems were still vulnerable to growing demands for water and other natural resources, expanding tourism, greater rates of out-migration, incidences of conflict and the pressures of industry, mining and agriculture. The report emphasized the need for higher levels of funding and investment in mountain areas, enhanced coordination and collaboration at all levels, and a stronger enabling environment with more supportive laws, policies and institutions.

58. FAO, which had served as the lead United Nations agency for the International Year of Mountains in 2002 and was the lead coordination agency for International Mountain Day, celebrated on 11 December every year, continued to help countries find solutions to their mountain-related problems. Much of the substantive work was being done by the countries themselves. It was through their vision, dynamism and initiatives that real change was taking place.

59. **Ms. Bilello** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the International Year of Planet Earth (A/62/376), said that the Year would begin in January 2008 and would be launched at UNESCO headquarters in February. The key international event of the Year would be the International Geological Congress to be held in Oslo in August. Throughout the Year, UNESCO and the International Union of Geological Sciences would work to raise public awareness of ways in which the Earth sciences contributed to sustainable socio-economic development.

60. **Mr. Inomata** (Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)) introduced the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Towards a United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Programme for Disaster Response and Reduction: Lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster" (A/62/699-E/2007/8 and Add.1). In January 2005, in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster and the launching of the Hyogo Framework for Action adopted by the World Conference on Disaster

Reduction, the Joint Inspection Unit had decided to undertake a comprehensive review of the role of the United Nations system in disaster reduction and response. The decision had been based on established procedures of consultation on the selection of subjects with participating organizations under a provision of the JIU statute. The report had been submitted to the United Nations system agencies on 6 October 2006 and to the Economic and Social Council, and was submitted to the General Assembly under the agenda items being considered by the Committee.

61. The report contained 17 recommendations, 6 of them addressed to the General Assembly and 11 to the Chief Executives. The Secretary-General, on behalf of the Chief Executives Board, had concurred with most of the recommendations, including recommendations 2, 3, 4, 7, 9 and 12, which called for the preparation of a series of studies and proposals for consideration by the Economic and Social Council. Recommendation 12 was relevant to the Committee's discussion on the wish of the Secretary-General to review the current method of financing the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and its activities and to consider alternative options including the use of assessed contributions (A/62/320, para. 80).

62. The JIU recommendations would provide a solution to long-standing problems inherent in the United Nations humanitarian system. The proposed establishment of a United Nations programme for humanitarian assistance for disaster response and reduction was justified in view of the magnitude of the resources and the diversity of the actors involved at different stages of disaster management and risk reduction, as well as the need to constitute a core critical mass capability of the United Nations Secretariat. The creation by the Economic and Social Council of an intergovernmental committee on disaster reduction response open to the main stakeholders and actors concerned was also justified. Only in such a forum could the governmental stakeholders establish the collective will, as a basis for the strategic management of the resources they would mobilize. The proposed intergovernmental committee would fully draw on the technical expertise and findings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and take its decisions on the basis of their recommendations.

63. **Mr. Bilour** (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said it was regrettable that at its fifteenth session the Commission on Sustainable Development had not been able to reach agreement on the thematic cluster of energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution/atmosphere and climate change. The Group of 77 and China attached high priority to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy. The small island developing States, in particular, needed the support of the international community for their sustainable development efforts. Given that natural disasters were increasing in frequency and severity, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 must be fully implemented. It was important to examine the measures that needed to be taken to improve the response capacity of affected nations and the assistance that could be provided by the international community in that regard.

64. Climate change posed serious risks and challenges, particularly to developing countries. It was therefore important for all countries to work together in partnerships based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. The momentum generated by the thematic debate convened by the President of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly and the High-level Event on Climate Change should contribute to promoting a united response of the General Assembly to that important issue. The Committee's discussions should provide impetus and political support to the ongoing processes by promoting global consensus on climate change and contributing to a successful conclusion of the forthcoming Bali Climate Change Conference.

65. Desertification and land degradation posed a threat to sustainable development in general and to the environment in particular in many developing countries. Adequate and predictable resources should be made available to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. It was regrettable that the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention had not been concluded owing to lack of agreement on budget matters. Biodiversity could contribute significantly to poverty reduction; it was therefore extremely important for the negotiations on the international regime on access and benefit-sharing to be completed within the established time frame. The Group of 77 and China supported the UNEP Governing Council and the decisions adopted at its twenty-fourth session. They recognized the progress

made so far on the implementation of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, particularly through its Quick-Start Programme. The Group welcomed the recommendation of the Governing Council to declare 2010-2020 as the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification, and hoped the recommendation would be endorsed by the General Assembly.

66. The Group of 77 and China would appreciate clarification of the reasons for the delay in issuing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution on the oil slick on Lebanese shores.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.